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University of Florida IFAS
Marion County Horticulture Agent

**Timely Gardening Tips
for MARION COUNTY**
by Master Gardener, Jo Leyte-Vidal

**If you can brave the cold
out there you will find
lots to do in the garden.**

Clean and service your
garden tools and machinery.

Add compost to your vege-
table beds.

Plant beans, beets, carrots
collards, corn, lettuce,
onions, squash, sweet
potatoes, turnips, and kale.

Plant alyssum, dianthus,
pansy, petunia, nasturtium
phlox, and snapdragons. Be
prepared to protect them
from a late frost.

Prune poinsettias to 24
inches and fertilize with
6-6-6 and 2 teaspoons
Epsom salts for magnesium.

Mid month prune rose
bushes.

Monthly Newsletter

February 2011

PRUNING 101

by Master Gardener, Anne Lambrecht

We all know that our yards are not without maintenance. All growing things need air, light, water and care. Conferring with her new landscaper, a neighbor of mine requested “all color and no maintenance.” The landscaper suggested she install plastic flowers.

The mere mention of pruning strikes a chord of dread in many of us. But fear not: with a little education and sharp, clean tools, pruning your shrubbery can be fun and even therapeutic.

“Pruning is the selective removal of plant parts, typically shoots and branches, to improve health, control growth or enhance fruiting, flowering or appearance.” Pruning should always be a part of your gardening routine. I carry a pair of clean, sharpened pruners in my pocket when I garden.

Why prune?

Choosing the right plant can eliminate much of the pruning requirements in today’s landscapes. Unfortunately for many of us, our landscapes have been planted with shrubs that we like the looks of and then installed according to their current size and shape, not the size the plant is going to be in five years. Then it’s necessary to prune frequently to keep it within bounds or move the plant completely. So unless you’ve done your homework beforehand, pruning your shrubbery can be a real headache. Proper pruning is an art and an important landscape management practice. Making the right cuts in the right places to get the plant to be healthy and pretty is the art form.

What to prune?

Prune most plants and shrubs to remove dead, diseased, crossed, rubbing or broken branches.

When to prune?

Trees and shrubs can be lightly pruned anytime. Spring flowering plants such as azaleas, spireas, some hydrangea, camellia, Indian hawthorn and dogwoods should be pruned in late spring after flowering but before the flower buds set for the next season. They can be pruned at other times with the result being less flowers the next year.

Plants that produce flowers on current season’s growth such as allamanda, hibiscus, oleander, plumbago, thyralis, golden dew drop, bougainvillea, roses and bottlebrush, cassia, and crape myrtle are usually pruned while dormant or just before the spring growth flush. For us that flush is March-April-May, depending on the plant. When plants such as amaryllis or agapanthus (lily of the Nile) are finished blooming, trim the scape (stalk). The rule of thumb is: prune after flowering. If the plant never stops flowering, go ahead and prune anytime for shape, to thin it out, give it light and to clean it up. Don’t be afraid to cut.

Prune trees such as oaks, maples, hickory and other large shade trees during the dormant season or just following a growth flush. You see the landscapers trimming the live oaks on our medians in January. It is always good to know a good certified arborist.

How to prune

The key on how to prune is knowing where on the branch and the angle of the cut. Make a 45° cut at least ¼ inch right above the “bud” or “node” (the place from which the new growth will come out). Too close to the bud might damage or weaken it, too far from the bud would stunt it. Too slanted to the bud might damage the branch and too close to the bud might cause the bud to fall off.

RESERVE THE DATE

**UF/IFAS Marion
County Master
Gardener Spring
Festival -
March 12 & 13**

**Over 80 garden
vendors will be onsite
with plants and many
garden related items
for purchase. Spread
the word to your
family and friends.
Last year we had over
9,000 attendees. This
year we plan for it to
be bigger and better.
Information on
vendors and speakers
will be in next
month's newsletter.**



Got Questions?

What does 4-H have to offer my child? When is the best time to prune crepe myrtles? How can I make money off 10 acres of land? What is the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes?

uf/ifas marion county
EXTENSION SERVICE

We Have Answers

PRUNING 101 (Cont'd)

by Master Gardener, Anne Lambrecht

Techniques:

Prune to improve the look of the plant. Prune to thin out a plant. Thinning gives plants an open appearance allowing air and sunlight for new growth.

Prune to head back a plant. Heading back means selectively cutting the tips of twigs or young branches to a bud. This produces a denser tree or shrub because it increases the number of shoots and leaves.

Always work with the natural form of a plant keeping in mind that it needs air and light. If a shrub is too tall, it may need to be headed back and thinned. This is where the therapy comes in. I really like to trim crape myrtles and I trim mine right after they bloom and therefore can get three flushes of blooms during the growing season. Prune crape myrtles this month.

Do not prune when you transplant. Your plant is already stressed. Wait a few weeks until the roots have taken hold and then trim.

Each time I use my clippers, loppers and hedge shears, I clean my tools using a mild bleach solution to get rid of fungus and any invisible disease I may pick up while working. Dry the tools, and oil with a household oil. Sharpen with a file or scissor cutter.

Now, you're ready: so get out there and get some pruning therapy!

*Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs by Edward F. Gilman and Robert J. Black University of Florida Circular 853 <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg087>

RAISED BED GARDENING

by Master Gardener, Bill Miranda

Now is the time of the year to give thought to the kind of vegetable or flower garden you want, the kind that will give you pleasure and satisfaction. The mostly sandy soils in Marion County will grow fine plants provided we add amendments such as compost, peat, manure, etc. This applies to flower beds as well as vegetable gardens. Many pretty island beds of flowers and shrubs are raised beds made by mounding dirt higher than level ground.

Amended or improved soil contributes to good healthy growth of plants and improves quality and quantity of such plants. We can, however, increase the yields of vegetables by planting in raised beds which are about 8 to 12 inches high, with soil held in place by landscape timbers, concrete blocks, etc. The beds should be about four feet wide so you can work from either side - hoe, weed, etc., without stepping in the bed. The bed can be as long as you are comfortable with, keeping in mind you do not have to plant long rows of anything if you need only a small amount of vegetables. Eight or 16 foot long raised beds are ideal. Locate the bed in an area with 6 - 8 hours of sun daily and water close by.

The first step is to dig down about a foot and turn the soil, adding about an inch of compost. Then build the bed and fill it with enough soil to keep it even with the top of the timbers, and add another 1 or 2 inches of compost, peat, rotted manure and mix this in. The soil will be nice and loose and friable and will settle a few inches over a few months. This loose amended soil enables plant roots to grow easily, soaking up the nutrients in the soil for good growth and production of vegetables. Raised bed gardening has a big advantage - intensive planting.

RAISED BED GARDENING (Cont'd)

by Master Gardener, Bill Miranda

This is not a recent innovation to gardening. As a matter of fact, the Chinese, out of necessity, developed raised bed gardening over 4,000 years ago because they had small farms to provide income and to feed their families. They very patiently dug and leveled terraced plots on hillsides; the soil being held in place by raised borders of dirt called berms. These raised beds were very successful and were fertilized over the centuries by local manures and vegetative matter. Today, composted organic matter is used to amend sandy or clay soils. During the mid 1800's, French market farmers, with small farms, as little as an acre, built raised beds with soil and up to 18 - 24 inches of horse manure gleaned from the streets of Paris. This amount of manure provided heat as well as fertilizer value. These raised beds were so successful, the French farmers could grow four crops a year for the market in Paris. They planted the vegetables close together, eliminating space-wasting row planting, reducing weeds, conserving water and it has been very productive.

Planned planting is so effective and so productive, you will be amazed at the number of plants you can fit in a bed and how few beds you'll need to feed your family and give some extra produce to the neighbors. The advantages of raised beds compared to ground level gardens are numerous. Raised beds use less fertilizer and less water, and because the soil does not get stepped on and get compacted, it will stay loose and friable allowing air, moisture and warmth to reach the roots so they can grow and spread. Raised beds generally do not get water-logged, and since there will be fewer weeds we will save time for ourselves. Another advantage is that the gardener does not have to bend and stoop as much to weed, hoe and harvest.

The increased harvest allows you to grow more with less space, for example, a bed as small as 4' x 8' will grow enough salad fixins for two people, including lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, radishes, etc. You'll be amazed at how much you can grow in a bed. Be prepared for a huge increase in yields of fresh vegetables you will harvest!

It is best not to see how much we can plant in a raised bed, but to plant as much as we can comfortably use, plus a surplus to give to the neighbors. Also, because raised bed gardening is so easy, and recycles organic matter (compost), it is a good technique to teach to the kids and grandchildren. Happy planting!

What's Bugging You?

by Master Gardener, Inga Carbone

Find out what local residents are calling in about.

What is that puncture hole in my oranges?

Our earliest crop of oranges are Orlando tangelos which ripen the end of November followed by naval oranges in December and January and last to ripen are Hamlin juice oranges. This is first year that I have found an unusual number of fruit on the ground as it approached maturity. These fruits had a puncture wound the size of a pencil hole, when squeezed, the juice would ooze out of the opening, the fruit had a spoiled flavor and was no longer edible.

Examining the still hanging fruit, I found a number of oranges with these puncture wounds and they were no longer edible. As the oranges matured a white mossy fungus like growth spread over the fruit. Strangely the Hamlin orange had no symptoms.

Doing some research, I learned that my citrus crop was affected by "aspergillus rot" a fungus that is known better by citrus processors who store citrus for juicing and shipping. I only have 3 trees in my back yard, have had them for at least 10-12 years and never encountered this problem before.

Our County Extension Agent told me to collect all the rotten fruit and take it to the landfill and not to compost any of it because this fungus is highly contagious to other fruit crops such as grapes, mangoes, nuts, figs and many more.



Items below are available for purchase at the UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Service. Please come to see these environmentally-friendly products.

MICRO-IRRIGATION:

- Eco-friendly
- Plants love it
- Saves time & money

Eco-Friendly MULCH

AVAILABLE HERE...

Cost-Saving, Eco-Friendly

Rain Barrels

FOR SALE!

JUNIOR MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Do you have a youth interested in gardening? JMG introduces youth, ages 8 - 15 years, to the art and science of gardening and helps them develop leadership and other life skills to become good citizens within their communities. Classes will be held every other Saturday starting March 19 from 9am - 1pm at the Extension Office and ends July 9th. Cost will be \$30 per child to cover the cost of JMG handbook and supplies. Space is limited so register early. Registration deadline is February 18th.



UPCOMING LECTURES/EVENTS:

Educational seminars and events are presented by UF/IFAS Extension Agents and or Master Gardeners.

FEBRUARY**Palms in the Landscape**

February 3, 2011
10:30 am
Bellevue Library

Ask Your Master Gardener - Spring Veggies and Flowers

February 8, 2011
2:00 pm
Freedom Library

Ask Your Master Gardener - Spring Veggies and Flowers

February 12, 2011
2:00 pm
Library Headquarters—Ocala

Ask Your Master Gardener - Spring Veggies and Flowers

February 15, 2011
2:00 pm
Dunnellon Library

Ask Your Master Gardener - Spring Veggies and Flowers

February 19, 2011
2:00 pm
Marion Oaks Library

BIG TOMATO CONTEST

The event will begin with a seminar on growing tomatoes on Tuesday, March 15 at 6:30 pm in the UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Auditorium at 2232 NE Jacksonville Road in Ocala. Each registered participant will receive a tomato plant to get started. To register e-mail Cindy at cynthia.steinke@marioncountyfl.org by February 28.



Foundation for the Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution

SPRING COLOR by Florida Yards & Neighborhood Coord., Kathleen Patterson

Sit back and relax, imagine warm temperatures and plenty of beautiful flowers. Now is the time to be thinking about your spring gardening plan of action. As we sit snugly in our homes during the colder months the catalog companies begin sending their spring catalogs for us to drool over. A word of caution, many of the plants they offer will not do well in our hot, humid Florida environment. So choose carefully or not at all as I have chosen to do. I have over the years ordered many plants only to be very disappointed when they failed to thrive, let alone the money I wasted.

Many of our choices will flower throughout the spring, summer and fall so you may find some repetition as we move through summer and fall color. Have you ever heard of pineapple guava (*Acca sellowiana*)? This is an evergreen shrub with beautiful thick grayish green leaves. In the spring unusual red flowers suitable for butterflies and bees followed by edible berries in the fall. Allamanda begins blooming soon as does bougainvillea. The camellias are just finishing up as the butterfly bush begins. Million bells (*Calibrachoa*) are great for hanging baskets and are nearly always in full flower (hence the name, million bells).

Trumpet vine in shades of lavender and peach climb fences, as does the cross vine and trumpet creeper. False heather begins with its delicate purple blooms and the yellow and white African iris begins their blooming cycle. My favorite, the golden dewdrop (*Duranta repens*) still has golden berries and the beginnings of the purple, lavender or white flowers that again bloom most of the year.

Thryallis (*Galphimia gracilis*), gardenias, Carolina jessamine, daylilies and hydrangea (both the native oakleaf and the bigleaf macrophylla are forming buds just waiting to burst forth with blues, purples, pinks and cream. Tea olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) is beginning to bloom now and offer a pleasant scent as you brush by them. Plumbago that was not damaged by frost continues to bloom through the year.

Loropetalum (fringe flower) begins with blooms of bright pink flowers nestled amongst burgundy foliage beginning in late January. Passionflowers begin blooming late in the spring, but are worth the wait. I have six varieties of passionflower in my landscape and they offer food for the caterpillars and nectar for the butterflies and hummingbirds. Flame vine continues with its brilliant orange flowers and the Indian hawthorne begins flowering during January or February.

Of all the spring plants, I think that the one I love the most is the native azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*) in a variety of colors ranging from yellow, to pink to salmon. These are not like the azaleas that you pick up at Home Depot or Lowe's. For these you must find a local nursery that carries them as they are native. Roses and salvias continue to bloom and beautiful sedum groundcover is showing its beauty.

Spirea and cape honeysuckle are beginning to bloom as the princess flower (*Tibouchina urvilleana*) begins its growth cycle and starts producing beautiful purple flowers the size of golf balls. The confederate jasmine is just beginning to bloom in March but offers a delightful scent as the brisk breeze passes through. Our native Walter's viburnum (shrub to tree size) begins with delicate white blooms followed by red berries. What a great plant for the birds in our landscape. My wisteria begins blooming in February or March and continues through May. Clusters of lavender scented flowers send me outside as often as I can to enjoy their beauty and their fragrance.



Have I wetted your appetite to think about plants for your landscape that offer color, texture and fragrance and can be bought right here in Marion County? Stick with the tried and true Marion County plants and you will be delighted to discover that gardening is quite easy when you do it the Florida-Friendly way!

(Thryallis in bloom.)

